

How many of us are hardwired to seek resolution, believing we need to try something and if that does not work, we can make another decision, then another? How many of us need to have every piece of information and full understanding before we risk commitment to a decision? I knew a church that had had the same Sign Marquee by the street since invention of the car. In horse and buggy days, even early cars, people travelled no more than 10 mph so the sign was parallel to the road, but as people moved faster, the sign needed to be perpendicular, to be read from both sides at 35 mph. The church had waited to make a change as the sign decayed, and when finally acted upon, the committee ordered what the catalogue described as a traditional sign, but when the sign was installed in a new stone foundation the sides were blue plastic with 10 florescent tubes inside. The thing absolutely glowed! The Church became known as the “the Kmart Blue-Light Special”. At which, the Session donated the sign board to a more urban setting and using the stone foundation replaced the sign with redwood painted black/gold lettering.

Most of us at one time or another have hung on the cusp of a decision delayed, an unresolved obligation. The promise may be as simple as fixing a squeaky door, a leaky faucet or overgrown weeds we said we would get to; or as massive as getting help for an addiction or disease. We have waited and waited and waited, even for decades for something to change, for what we feel is an obligation to be fulfilled. And you know as well as I, that the longer justice is delayed, the more we wonder if justice will be denied. As soon as an offer is made, even if it was not a formal promise, but a hope, there is created within us an expectation obligation. It can be painful to wait for what we believe is promised, but not realized.

When what we believe seems a reasonable request, a promise deeply hoped for delayed, it is easy to foster distrust, to lose faith in the one who made the promise. In the world today, we are regularly disappointed and disheartened and it is all but impossible to trust. It then becomes easy for relationships to become estranged, if they survive at all. Obligations made and unfulfilled, are a hurtful big deal. This does not matter whether the distrust is between a couple, parent and child, siblings, friends, neighbors. But what if the estrangement, the hope of promise-delayed, is between us and God? What happens when our faith in God is called into question? As intimate and important as these other relationships, how much more painful is it to be estranged from the One who is life itself?

Luke wrote this Gospel several generations after the life and death of Jesus. From the earliest disciples, women and men like us tried to make sense of this new reality: that Jesus had lived, died, been resurrected and Ascended to Heaven; what they clung to was a Promise of Return, a Second Coming. They expected Christ’s return immediately!

And the more they experienced delay, the more they doubted, if he would ever come back!

The more they questioned if the Bodily Ascension was real!

If the Resurrection from death to life did happen!

The more they questioned if he had ever come, and if God truly loved them or if God were real!

In addition, they were living with real suffering and oppression. This longed-for promise became the foundation of all their Christian faith. Keep in mind, that in an age before electronics and printed books, mothers nursed their babies, sang to their children, reciting stories they had been told, all reminding them that Jesus would return. That assurance, that the Savior would come again, became the hope they clung to in the midst of abuse. The Psalmists describe: “How long O Lord, How long? Rouse yourself Lord! Why do you sleep? Have you forgotten us? Wake up! Do not forget us forever!” This is the reason why Luke tells us in the verse that introduces this parable, that Jesus told this so that people would not lose heart. While this is a parable on Prayer, and a Parable on the steadfast assurance that God hears our prayers; at its core, this is a Parable on Trusting God to be faithful, to bring vindication and hope.

The woman in the Parable is a Widow. According to Jewish Law: people, particularly those in authority, were to fulfill God's purpose by demonstrating Care for Widows and Orphans. The specifics of her circumstance, the nature of her case do not matter. The Bible is filled with stories of Widows, perhaps this was even Jesus; Mother Mary. What matters is: Because she had no one else, she should have been among those any respectable judge was obligated to help, the community was required to assist.

But, as Jesus said: This was no respectable judge. This judge neither fears God nor has any regard for anyone other than himself.

BUT, this is no ordinary Widow! She is bold. She is brash. She is Uppity! She demands her case, knowing all the while that even for her to be heard has previously been denied. And for quite a while, the Judge refuses. But in the end even the Unrighteous relents.

This translation says "because she will wear me out." The Greek is even more explicit, literally saying "Because she will Blacken my Eye!" Which could mean fear that she would punch him in the face, or Giving a Black Eye can also be reference to Shame, and she could undermine his reputation in the community of his failure as a judge. While the Judge has no fear of God or regard for anyone, you can bet he cares about what everyone else thinks, so the Unrighteous relents.

This Parable is not an Allegory where every character correlates to someone: God is not an UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE who does not listen. Instead, the comparison here is from the Lesser to Greater. If this Unrighteous Judge does not care but even he responds bringing fulfillment of Promise // then HOW MUCH MORE will God who loves You, loves Justice, is the God of Promise, do for you?

If the Parable does attach itself to Prayer, this is where it does so. The Parable instructs us PRAYER WORKS. Because our prayers for what we most care for often seem to be met with long silence: Prayer is hard work. Trusting against all the disappointments of all a lifetime. Hoping against delay.

To listen to some in the world today there is a PROSPERITY GOSPEL: "Prayer is easy. Bow your heads and recite the words. Ask and it shall be given. Knock and the door will be opened. Prayer is the way to get Spiritual Rewards. Some even go so far as to say as the way to Material Goods. "If you do not receive, then there must be something wrong with the faith of the believer! You are not Faithful or Praying hard enough!"

This is not what I believe! Prayer has ALWAYS COST MORE than it has given. Prayer never resulted in my receiving a Wad of Bills, a Gold Limousine, or Happiness. And Call me crazy for trying, but prayer has often resulted in more questions than answers. I had a mentor who was an old Black Civil Rights Preacher, who said: "Until you have stood at the door and knocked so long and so hard, that your knuckles bleed, until you wept in prayer to your God, you do not know the depths of prayer!"

In Prayer, I have often felt like Jacob who wrestled with God, struggled for his own life. The truth of the matter is, those who have taught me the most are not those who claim to have all the answers, but those who have practiced hopeful, uppity prayer demanding their needs from God.

Most of life seems to me to be characterized by waiting with unanswered questions, doubts and hope, rather than bathed in clear answers. THEREFORE, in the face of delayed promise: Pray like an uppity widow ready to give a black eye to one denying her to be heard. Realize that in long periods of silence, when we pray UPPITY PRAYERS, we are TRANSFORMED & TRANSGURED to be UPPITY PRAY-ERS, to be changed from broken sin-stained vessels into vessels able to finally hold the precious answers when they are given!

That transformation, offering prayers in exile, in dryness, praying in the face of silence, to PRAYING UPPITY is what Thomas Merton described as "PURE PRAYER", prayer that is no longer focused on SELF, prayer that

is no longer even focused on the words, or on the act of praying, but to RE-ORIENT the SOUL UTTERLY on GOD.

Pray boldly, audaciously, without ceasing! But above all: pray in trust and confidence and HOPE in GOD, who is worthy of our FAITH.

Do not lose heart.

Do not despair.

God loves you.